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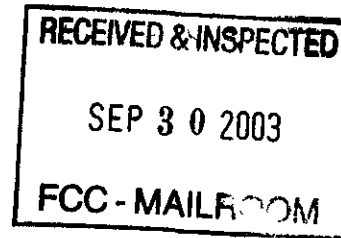
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September 23, 2003

Distribution Center

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch  
Secretary, Federal Communications Commission  
445 - 12<sup>th</sup> Street, S. W.  
Washington, D. C. 20554



CC 9867

Dear Ms. Dortch:

In late June, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) released an order that reduced the per-minute rate that video relay service (VRS) providers receive by more than 50 percent. This decision has had, and will continue to have if left unchanged, a serious negative impact on communication accessibility for deaf and hard of hearing people nationwide.

Technology has greatly enhanced the way deaf people communicate with the hearing world. Text-based communications devices, such as TTYs, e-mail, and instant messaging, have helped to reduce communications barriers; but they are effective only if both the hearing and deaf person have the proper equipment, and they cannot convey the emotion or visual cues that are vital to human communication. When video relay services came on the market, a new era in communication was introduced, and the deaf and hard of hearing community benefited substantially. Video relay services leveled the playing field by enabling deaf and hard of hearing people to communicate with hearing individuals on the telephone naturally, easily, and quickly.

As a result of the rate reduction, however, service quality has already begun to deteriorate. Instead of recruiting and retaining highly capable, nationally certified interpreters with the appropriate skills for VRS, service providers are considering less qualified and less expensive resources. Hours of service availability have begun to decrease, outreach and educational programs are being cut back, and further development of VRS technology will be affected.

Gallaudet University is the only institution of higher education in the world that serves primarily deaf and hard of hearing students. Gallaudet is a partner of Sorenson, a VRS vendor, to provide VRS. We have a member on our Board of Trustees who is a VRS vendor and we have several members on our Board of Associates who are VRS providers and/or pay into the VRS funding pool. I am hopeful that the FCC will reconsider its decision and accept the NECA analysis and recommendation for reimbursement at \$14.02 per conversation minute. It would be terribly disheartening to see the remarkable advances made in 2003 curtailed so abruptly.

Your reconsideration would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

I. King Jordan  
President

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